

In the Claims:

Cancel claims 85, 88, 89, 97, 98, 100, 105, 106, 114 and 115 without estoppel or disclaimer of the subject matter thereof, and amend claims 84, 90, 91, 93, 94, 99, 107, 108, 110 and 111, and add new claims 120, 121 as follows:

1-83. (Canceled).

84. (Currently Amended) A tissue dissector, comprising:

an elongated tubular body having a proximal end and a distal end and enclosing an endoscopic imaging ~~fibers~~ element; and

a dissecting, viewing and dilating unit removably mounted on the distal end of the tubular body ~~distal end~~, including:

a transparent distal tip having substantially conical tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on a distal end of the ~~dilating~~ unit to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the tubular body through tissue under endoscopic visualization; and

a non-inflatable dilating element disposed proximally of the distal tip and having a substantially olive-shaped exterior contour that gradually increases in size in the proximal direction from a distal edge thereof ~~until~~ to a maximum cross-sectional dimension greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the tubular body, the dilating element then decreasing in size to a proximal

edge, ~~the gradual size increase and decrease therefore~~ for facilitating atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip.

85. (Canceled).

86. (Withdrawn) The tissue dissector of claim 84, further including at least one resilient member positioned on an outer surface of the tubular body near the distal end thereof, and wherein the dilating unit further comprises a mating recess for engaging the resilient member and mounting the dilating unit on the distal end of the tubular body in a snap-fit engagement.

87. (Withdrawn) The tissue dissector of claim 84, further including a lever-actuated locking device formed on the tubular body and the dilating element including a mating pin and recess for mounting the dilating element on the distal end of the tubular body and enable easy removal.

88-89. (Canceled).

90. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the exterior contour of the dilating element includes peripheral faceted surfaces located ~~distally with respect to~~ near the point of maximum cross-sectional dimension.

91. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 90, wherein the peripheral faceted surfaces ~~define~~ include axially-aligned ridges that facilitate dilation of tissue.

92. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the exterior contour of the dilating element includes axially-aligned ribs and flutes.

93. (Currently Amended). The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the maximum cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is at least two times larger than the cross-section sectional dimension of the distal end of the tubular body.

94. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 93, wherein the maximum cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is between 15-30 mm.

95. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the dilating element is compressible.

96. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the tubular body is an endoscope.

97-98. (Canceled).

99. (Currently Amended) A tissue dissector, comprising:
an elongated tubular body having a proximal end and a distal end and enclosing an endoscopic imaging ~~fibers~~ element;
a transparent distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the tubular body to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the tubular body through tissue under endoscopic visualization; and

a non-inflatable dilating element of fixed outer dimension having substantially ovoidal exterior shape removably mounted on the tubular body proximal to the distal tip, ~~the dilating element~~ and having an exterior contour that gradually increases in size in the proximal direction from a distal edge thereof until a maximum cross-sectional dimension greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the tubular body, the dilating element then gradually decreasing in size to a proximal edge, ~~the gradual size increase and decrease therefore~~ for facilitating atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip.

100. (Canceled)

101. (Withdrawn) The tissue dissector of claim 99, further including at least one resilient member positioned on an outer surface of the tubular body near the distal end thereof, and wherein the dilating element further comprises a mating recess for engaging the resilient member and removably positioning the dilating element on the tubular body in a snap-fit engagement.

102. (Withdrawn) The tissue dissector of claim 99, further including a lever-actuated locking device formed on the tubular body and the dilating unit including a mating pin and recess for mounting the dilating unit on the distal end of the tubular body and enable easy removal.

103. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the distal tip and dilating element are formed as a single unit removably mounted on the tubular body.

104. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the distal tip is removably mounted on a distal end of the dilating element.

105-106. (Canceled).

107. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the exterior contour of the dilating element includes peripheral faceted surfaces located ~~distally with respect to~~ near the point of maximum cross-sectional dimension.

108. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 107, wherein the peripheral faceted surfaces ~~define~~ include axially-aligned ridges that facilitate dilation of tissue.

109. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the exterior contour of the dilating element includes axially-aligned ribs and flutes.

110. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the maximum cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is at least two times larger than the cross-section sectional dimension of the distal end of the tubular body.

111. (Currently Amended) The tissue dissector of claim 110, wherein the maximum cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is between 15-30 mm.

112. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the dilating element is compressible.

113. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the tubular body is an endoscope.

114-115. (Canceled).

116. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the dilating element is rigid.

117. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 99, wherein the dilating element is solid.

118. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the dilating element is rigid.

119. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 84, wherein the dilating element is solid.

120. (New) The tissue dissector of claim 84, in which the dilating element is elastic.

121. (New) The tissue dissector of claim 99, in which the dilating element is elastic.